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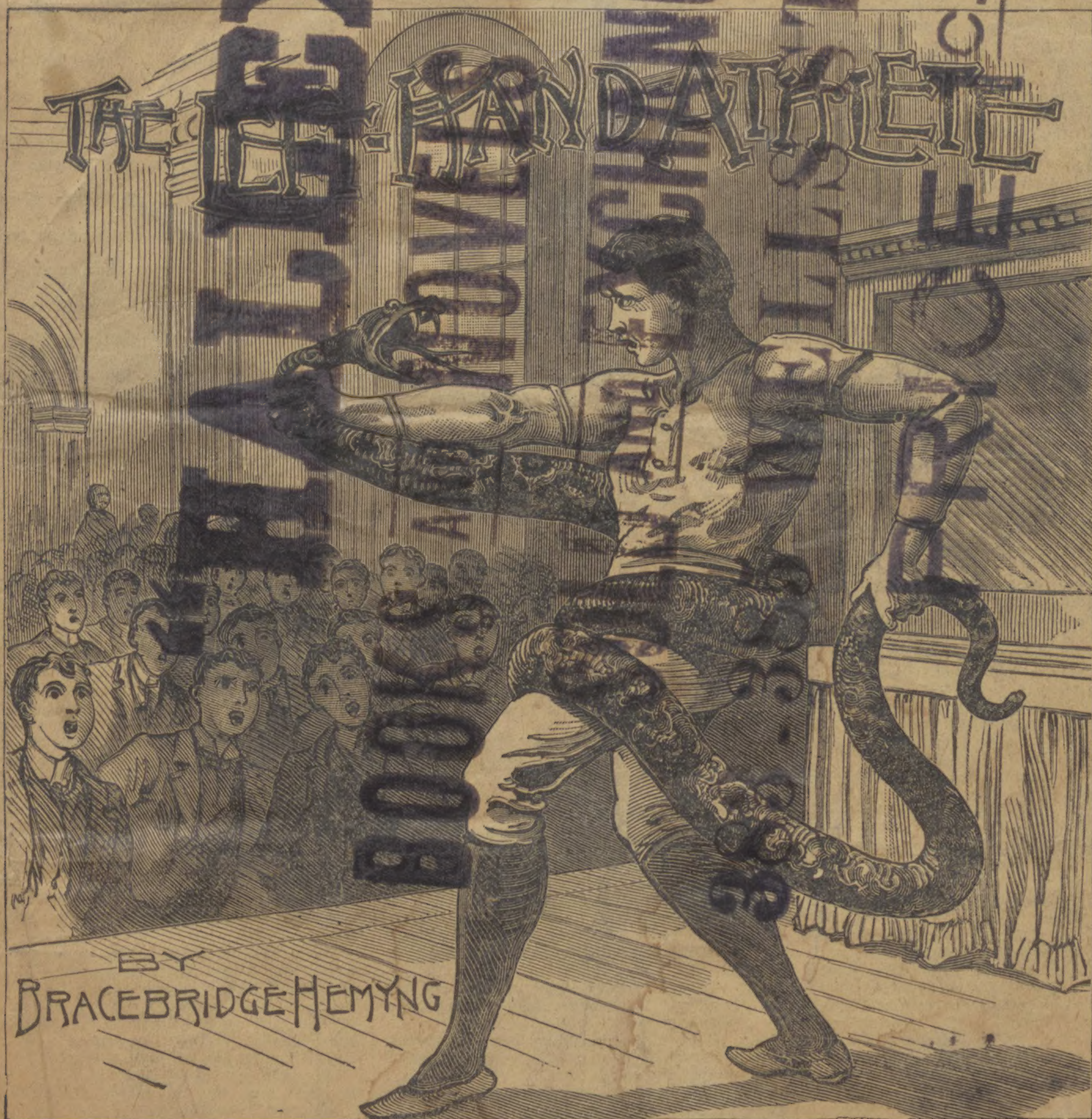
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BEFORE JOE WAS AWARE OF THE SNAKE'S INTENTION, IT FLUNG ITS COILS AROUND HIS BODY.

The Left-Hand Athlete;

OR,

THE RIVAL SCHOOL SPORTS

BY BRACEBRIDGE HEMYNG.

CHAPTER I.

THE BOSS SPORT.

"Say, Fred, we are going to a big private school on Long Island."

"How do you know?"

"I heard your father talking to my guardian, yesterday."

"What did they say?"

"That we ought to enter a collegiate institution, and complete our education."

"Good enough! I'm ready!"

"So am I, and I tell you, I mean to be boss at every game and sport."

"Nobody can beat you."

The speakers were Joe Manley, a broad-shouldered athlete of about eighteen, and his chum, Fred Standish, a year younger.

They were in a New York gymnasium, where they spent much of their time.

Both loved sport and athletic exercise.

Manley was known as Left-Hand Joe among his friends, for he could hit with terrific force and had wonderful power in his left arm.

Tall and well built, he was regarded as a handsome, clever fellow.

At sixteen he was "cock of the walk" at everything he attempted.

His guardian, Mr. Hardy, a ship broker, had control of a large fortune, which had been left Joe by his father.

The will stated that if Joe died before attaining his majority, the money was to go to the guardian.

Mr. Hardy used Joe's cash, to some extent, for speculative purposes, and would have been glad to hear of his death, at any moment.

A cruel, selfish man was John Hardy. He had a secretary, Paul Panton, who was even a greater schemer and villain than he was himself.

He offered him a large sum if he would make some fatal accident befall Joe.

Panton undertook the commission.

Warily he went to work.

His was a hidden hand that stalked in the dark.

Joe had another enemy.

This was a relative of Mr. Hardy, a young Cuban, by name Alfonso Diaz, known as the Cuban Giant.

Taller than Left-Hand Joe, he was, yet his inferior in strength and skill.

The Cuban hated his rival, Left-Hand Joe, yet he pretended to like him, and be his friend and admirer.

The Cuban Giant was false and revengeful.

His hot Spanish blood was easily stirred.

Joe had a friend in Mr. Hardy's daughter, who often warned him against the Cuban.

Paul Panton and Alfonso were very intimate.

They plotted in secret against Joe, devising schemes to injure him.

The school to which Joe Manley and Fred Standish were sent at the beginning of the autumn was at Flushing, on Long Island.

Every one considered it a very high-toned establishment.

When Joe was at home, one night, a man in a black mask tried to strangle him, and Joe was only saved by his friend Fred, who was sleeping in the next room.

Little did they think that the wretch was no other than the Cuban.

This showed what a relentless foe Alfonso Diaz intended to be to him.

The annual sports were coming on, and Left-Hand Joe looked forward eagerly to the event.

He intended to enter for every trial of strength.

Would he be victorious?

That is the question.

The Cuban Giant was strong, tall and wiry, and was likely to prove a formidable antagonist.

We shall see what occurred.

CHAPTER II.

SAMBO'S BRUSH WITH PAT.

It was Monday, the day appointed for the return of pupils to Seaview Academy. The principal always gave them three days' vacation for Thanksgiving, after which act of grace they were supposed to be doubly assiduous in the pursuit of their studies.

Two important personages of the institution were Pat, the gardener, and Sambo, the man of all work—an Irishman and a negro, who were constantly quarrelling and making it up again.

On the morning of the day in question Pat and Sambo were standing at the main entrance of the academy.

"The top of the mornin' to yez, Mis-ther Sambo!" exclaimed Pat. "It's foine weather, but it's cowl'd, bejabers."

"This chile thinks there will be some frost mighty soon," replied Sambo.

"That's what the boys will be afther enjoying. The field sports take place next week, and they would be all the better with a skating match thrown in."

"If there's snow, it will be your place, Patrick, to sweep the ice clean."

"No, I didn't engage for that. I reckon it's your place to take on the sweeping."

"I will speak to Mr. Manley about that," exclaimed Sambo; "he's the head of the sports committee."

"Golly; there will be heaps of fun, kicking the ball, putting the stone, running, and jumping, lifting the bullock, and a lot more."

"Arrah, be aisy, now!"

"Why should I be easy?"

"Faith, and it's meself that will tell ye Mr. Manley isn't everybody in this school."

"I am betting that he will win every prize in the sports, for suah."

"Shut up, darkey! There's a new chap coming, who is called the Cuban Giant. He can whip Manley, and I will ask him whether you are to swape the ice clane or not."

"Irish, you're a stupid! I pity you for the want ob sense."

"Bedad, you black naggur, I'll have to tache yez manners!"

"You couldn't instruct me. I couldn't be taught by a flannel-mouthed Micky."

"Don't venture too far, you hathen, or I'll go for your wool!"

"Come on! I'se ready for the battle. Order your funeral, for there will be a dead Irishman."

"Thunderation! As sure as my name is Paddy from Cork, I'll stand no more ob it."

"See here! I've got a razor in my boot, and I'll cut you deep if you tries a whack at me."

This was invariably Sambo's threat, although, in fact, he had no such weapon about him.

The Irishman was better off, for he was armed with a stout hickory stick, which he called his sprig shillelagh.

With a growl like that of an angry

bear Pat rushed at the negro, but when close to Sambo, the darkey lowered his head and butted the Irishman in the stomach.

This caused him to roll several yards and finally double up in a heap.

"Yah! yah!" laughed Sambo, "what do you take me for, you fool, Irish?"

Pat sat up and gasped for breath, feeling like an exhausted receiver, and inhaled the air to "get his wind" again.

"Holy Mary!" groaned Pat; "it's done for I am, sure, and sure I am dying. Oh give me an illigant wake."

"Get up, Irish! I haven't done with you yet. In fact, I am only just beginning."

"Lave off, bad cess, to yez!"

"How do you like the butt I gib you?"

"Sure and your head is harder than the rock ob Cashet."

"Go long! I was only foolin' with you, that time. I just wanted you to know what I can do."

"I have had enough!"

"I'se de boss batterin' ram."

"Begorra, you are that!"

"Oh, I'm all there, I want you to know!"

"Let me die in pace!" moaned Pat, as he rubbed his corporosity.

"Yes," avowed Sambo, complacently:

"I'se proud to claim that I is a combination of de steam roller, and de steam plough driver."

Just then the sound of wheels was heard coming up to the gate.

The boys were beginning to return to Seaview.

This was the first arrival, and in spite of his complaints, Pat scrambled to his feet and prepared to make himself useful.

On an occasion like this both the Irishman and the "cullud man" expected to get plenty of tips for taking charge of baggage belonging to the pupils.

The carriage drove up and deposited Joe Manley, Fred Standish, and Alfonso Diaz, and before twelve o'clock all the students, about sixty in number, were again in their school home.

CHAPTER III.

THE CUBAN'S CHALLENGE.

As may be imagined, the Cuban Giant was to everybody an object of curiosity and admiration.

Speculation was rife as to his chance of carrying off the prizes at the school sports.

During the time that intervened, his practise was carefully watched, and much betting went on in his favor.

The young men in the first class, who were only twelve in number, had a large room set apart for their private use.

On the afternoon of the day before the sports, Joe was reading in his room when the door was opened by Sambo, who ushered in the Cuban Giant, attired like a sport, and smoking a fragrant Havana.

Fixing his eyes upon Joe, the Spaniard said, after a few minutes of preliminary conversation:

"You think you are going to have a walk over in the sports to-morrow?"

"I don't know about that," replied Joe.

"You will be a winner in wrestling, fencing, and boxing," remarked Fred, who had only just entered the room.

"We will get up a skating match if the frost last, but the ice is not thick enough yet," continued Joe.

The Cuban Giant looked at him with a sneer.

"You seem fond of making matches, Manley," he remarked.

"Why not? Is there any harm in it?"

"None at all. I'll make one for you, if you like, and put up a hundred dollars stake money."

"What for?"

"Something that you will decline to undertake."

Joe would never allow it to be said that he declined a challenge.

"I will accept anything that involves a trial of strength or skill, such as an athlete may legitimately engage in," he rejoined.

"Do you accept this?" demanded the Cuban, impatiently.

"You can't frighten me; whatever it is it shall be a match."

"Good! If you come out the winner, I will pay you a hundred dollars, or—"

He paused and looked viciously at Joe.

The young athlete was puzzled at his breaking off so abruptly.

"Why don't you go on and finish your sentence?"

"I was going to add," the Cuban said, "that if you get defeated, I will pay your funeral expenses!"

Joe Manley started.

"Is it to be a life and death struggle?" he asked.

"You shall judge for yourself; but, mind you, there is no backing out now. You have given your word."

"And I am willing to stick to it."

"This afternoon. This afternoon I made the acquaintance of a man who is just come into the town with a show," said the Spaniard.

"What's his line of business?"

"Oh, it's common enough. He's a snake handler and charmer, and I will back his twenty-foot long python against you."

"How does the showman manage to handle his reptiles?"

"He gives them opiates and stuff to soothe them; but you will have to meet this fellow fair and square. There will be no humbug about this trial of strength."

"When do you want it to take place?"

"To-morrow will be a whole holiday. What time will the sports be over?"

"We shall begin early and finish about two o'clock."

"That will do. I will run down town again now, and fix the contest for three, in the showman's tent."

He threw away the stump of his cigar and putting on his hat, walked out of the room.

The two friends were much perplexed.

"This is a queer start," said Fred.

"No mistake about that?"

"What did you take it on for? You must have been a mug."

"He led me on so artfully, I fell into the trap."

"By jove, you did! I can't help calling you a flat."

"Perhaps I deserve it."

"You do, but, it isn't too late to cry off."

"No! no!" protested the athlete.

"Reflect. Twenty feet of snake against six foot two of man is rather long odds."

"If he is a constrictor, he isn't venomous," observed Joe, which was the only consolation he had in the matter.

CHAPTER IV.

MATCH WITH A SNAKE.

The morning of the sports' day at Seaview Academy broke dull and cloudy, but the rain kept off.

It was nine o'clock when the games began.

In a tent was a handsome array of silver cups, badges, and medals for the winners.

Although Alfonso ran him close in several contests, Joe Manley won all but the long jump; he was placed first in the running, leaping, football kicking, bicycling, big stone throwing, and other feats.

His school fellows gave him a perfect ovation, and he was chaired to the pavilion on the ground where the prizes were presented and lunch was served.

Paul Panton had come down to see the sports. He had been sent by Mr. Hardy, he said, and on his guardian's behalf presented the young champion with a purse containing twenty-five dollars.

It was a triumph for Joe all round; yet there was a spice of bitterness in his cup of joy.

He could not help thinking of the match that was to take place that afternoon—the Cuban's match.

Man versus snake! Pah! The thought of it made him feel faint.

Alfonso Diaz handed Joe a card with an address on it.

"That is the crib," he said. "Don't forget your engagement for this afternoon."

"I have booked it," was the reply.

"Four o'clock is the time, sharp."

"I shall be on hand."

Panton was behind Joe.

"Allow me to congratulate you on your prowess. Most sincerely," he complimented.

"It is nothing to what I intend to do, sir," was answered.

"Ah, the possibilities of the future for the young are infinite. You have my hearty good wishes for your success," saying which Mr. Paul Panton glided from the tent.

Outside he met Alfonso, linked his arm in his, and walked away with him down the road.

"To the victor belong the spoils," remarked Panton. "Manley's study will be better decorated than yours to-night."

"There may be no one inside," replied the Cuban, significantly shaking his head.

"If the nest is empty, where will the bird be?"

"Among the dead."

"Ha! You have some design?"

"A deep one, comrade," said Alfonso—"better than the strangling scheme in New York."

"What is it?"

"You shall be taken into my confidence, for we are both working for the same end."

"For Joe Manley's humiliation?"

"Caramba! Rather say his annihilation!"

"That is what I intended to say," observed Paul Panton. "Only I did not like to put it too plainly for fear some one might be listening."

"If this fails, I will drown him in an ice accident, or—"

"Say no more!" Panton interrupted.

"I, too, have an idea. A ship of Mr. Hardy's is in the Sound, close at hand. We will get him on board and—"

"I understand!"

The two villains were thoroughly in accord; Left-Hand Joe was envied by dire danger, though he knew it not.

As they went along, the Cuban explained to his companion the nature of the contest in which Joe was to engage with the python.

"It is a bold conception. Is Manley allowed to use arms?"

"Only his own," was replied.

"Then it is two to one on the serpent.

I have seen the huge pythons of South America crush an ox in their fearsome coils."

They soon reached the snake charmer's tent, which was pitched in the back yard of a saloon. It was lighted up, for the "Professor," whose name was Marco, was awaiting their coming, by arrangement.

A score of people, including the reporter of a local paper, who paid one dollar a head for admission had assembled—all anxious to witness this extraordinary contest.

Mr. Panton and Diaz took their seats among the small audience.

The snake, which was a handsome specimen of its species, was confined in a large wooden box, with a plate glass face.

It was restless and to all appearance hungry.

Usually it was fed every three days, receiving pigeons or rabbits, but it had been purposely neglected, lately, to make it more active.

In the middle of its body it was nearly as thick as a man's thigh.

The stage was erected under a flaring naphtha lamp.

On the platform Professor Marco performed his snake charming feats which looked wonderful, but were in reality simple; his serpents were gorged with food and stifled with morphine, chloroform or ether, while their poison fangs all had been drawn. Rendered thus harmless, they were easily handled.

Joe and Fred Standish appeared at the appointed time.

The spectators received them with light cheers and clapping of hands, after which silence reigned.

It was a dull, heavy, oppressive quiet, which seemed to be the calm before the storm which often heralds a tragedy.

Joe Manley and Fred Standish walked up a small step ladder which led to the stage.

Throwing off his flannels and mufflers, Joe stood revealed in a pink silk shirt and drawers.

Professor Marco was also on the stage. He bowed, shook hands with Manley, then made a little speech to the audience.

"Gentlemen, Mr. Joe Manley, the champion boy athlete of America, who can throw a horse over his head with ease, has matched himself for a sum of one hundred dollars to conquer my python in a wrestling contest."

"Hold on!" cried a burly farmer, "is this a trick performance?"

"On the contrary, it is genuine."

"But, if the snake gets the best of it he will kill the man!" urged the other.

"I am prepared for that," responded Professor Marco.

"How?"

"I have an anesthetic which I can put over the reptile's head and make him drop his coils double quick."

"That is satisfactory. I should not like to see anything happen to the young man, and these big snakes are pesky varmin'ts."

Fred Standish stood on one side of the stage to see fair play, and assist his friend, if necessary.

Alfonso Diaz sat in the front row of seats with a demoniac grin on his lips. He had privately arranged everything with Professor Marco; if the serpent conquered Joe he was to be allowed to be crushed to death!

The python was not to be interfered with in his deadly work.

No soporific had been prepared, though a bag smelling of ether was hanging on a nail driven into the post.

This was a subterfuge, for if the bag was slipped over the snake's head it would take no effect.

Professor Marco went to the box in which the great reptile was kept, and raising the lid allowed him to emerge from his nest.

Instantly, when free, the serpent coiled the lower parts of his body spirally and fixed his large saucer-like eyes upon Joe, standing near.

His forked tongue darted in and out of his capacious jaws.

In spite of his self-possession and in-born courage, the young athlete could not help trembling, but the fascination of the snake was upon him, holding him in thrall, and seemingly numbing his faculties.

A moment's reflection showed him that if he stood still he would be lost, so at once nerving himself for a desperate effort he took the initiative.

With a wild yell he broke the spell that might have bound him and rendered him nerveless, and darted upon the python, which he caught with both hands by the neck.

In vain he strove with all his strength to bear the constrictor to the floor; the snake resisted his efforts, and, with a quick movement it uncoiled, slinging out its huge length to its full extent.

Then before Joe was aware of its intention, it flung its coils around his body!

Holding on to the reptile's neck with his right hand Joe released his left and caught hold of the body near the tail.

CHAPTER V.

PLOTTING WITH SAMBO.

At this juncture came the tug of war. Joe was holding his enemy at arms' length at each extremity with both hands.

The young athlete's strength defied the serpent for a brief space, but, as there were three coils around his body, it was worse than being compressed in a vise, because these folds gradually tightened.

He drew his breath with the utmost difficulty. His ribs almost snapped under the pressure. A dead weight seemed to have settled upon his heart, which beat throbbingly. His eyes were starting from his head, which began to become dizzy. His face was convulsed and contorted with an indescribable species of horror, mingled with pain. Large beads of perspiration rolled down his cheeks, dropping off at the end of his chin.

The farmer who had before spoken now shouted:

"It's six to one on the snake! Who will take it?"

There was no response to this offer.

Joe was tottering about the stage like a drunken man, or one stricken with the palsy.

But, all at once, the situation was altered, as if by magic.

Using his phenomenal left hand with an almost despairing effort of power, he uncoiled the tail end of the serpent, tightening his hold on the neck, or throat. That left but one coil around him. Then, placing his left hand further along the body, and jerking out his right, at the same time, he freed himself from the awful constriction.

That was his moment of victory!

With one crowning exertion, which taxed his remaining energies to the utmost, he cast the python from him, as if it had been a mere plaything.

The serpent fell on the stage some dis-

tance off, where it writhed in sinuous folds, as if spent in its own strength. No further endeavor did it make to coil again.

And for a good reason!

In the final effort of the fight, Joe had given the great reptile a twist which had broken its spine about two-thirds of the way down from the head.

When this is the case with any reptile, it becomes wholly powerless.

"By gosh!" cried the farmer, "he's broken its beastly back! Hurrah!"

The cheer was taken up by the crowd and echoed vociferously.

This wonderful feat of the college athlete was one of the grandest things they had ever witnessed or heard of.

With his steel-grip left hand he had broken the back of the monster serpent.

Alfonzo Diaz with difficulty smothered a curse. He was deeply disappointed at the result. Once more he had been baffled—defeated in his vile plots.

To a man of his nature this was hard to bear, but he contrived to conceal his chagrin and feeling of hatred.

Accompanied by Paul Pantan he sprang upon the stage.

"Bravo!" he exclaimed, approaching Joe. "You are equal to St. Patrick, who drove snakes out of old Ireland. It was a grand feat. Bravo!"

"I will open a basket of wine," exclaimed Pantan. "You are a hero, Joe!"

"Not much of that, sir! It was a tough job, though," Joe replied, speaking hoarsely, and without any warning he fell forward. A dead faint had overtaken him.

The reaction had come, and he would have hurt himself if Fred Standish had not caught and supported him to a seat.

"Brandy!" he murmured, weakly.

This was given to him, and in a short time he recovered.

For some time he trembled and shuddered at intervals. He felt the hot, fetid breath on his face. He heard its terrible, menacing hiss. He saw its awful eyes, its dreadful fangs, and the white slime oozing out of its ponderous jaws. He felt the compression of its constricting coils!

An adjournment was made to the hotel, where a substantial supper was partaken of. After this Mr. Pantan returned to the city, and the three young men went back to school.

Alfonso then retired to his own room to muse over the situation and concoct some further scheme. Defeat was not for him! He would accomplish his purpose yet!

He began to smoke one of his favorite brand of cigars, and as he mused the darky Sambo knocked at the door, and came in, with a pail of coals.

"What do you know, Snowball?" asked Alfonso.

"Mighty cold night, sar," replied the negro. "De stars am shining in de sky like balls of fire. The therbometer—"

"You mean thermometer?" corrected Diaz.

"Yes, sar; dat am right. Dis chile say debometer. It am falling fast, going down to spero."

"Zero, you fool!"

"Precisely so, sar. Fine skating to-morrow on de lake."

"Good news that."

"No chance ob de frost breaking dis side ob Christmas. De professor has offered a prize to be skated for, to-morrow after twelve, by de young gentlemen ob dis school."

"Another cup for Joe Manley, I suppose," suggested the Cuban giant, spitefully.

"On a large table in his room, all covered with green baize, he displays thirty cups, forty-five medals, and three big vases, with two handles. These are his trophies."

"An' dat's jes why he am called the campus champion," suggested Sambo.

Alfonso looked up dreamily, and then interestedly.

"Do you know, Snowball, if he is entered for this skating race? Is he to be one of the contestants?"

"Yes, sar; de list ob names is on de table in de hall, and I see de snake killer write his pater nimick."

"Patronymic, you mean, you idiot. You ought to go to school to a Hottentot."

"Proud to say, sar, I'se hab a good eddication," answered the negro, drawing himself up with conscious dignity.

"So the snake story has got about already?"

"For suah! It has got around like a band wagon, for Massa Standish tells it all ober. Massa Manley's getting his name up mighty big."

"Little I care!" with a scowl.

"Why you not lower de champion's flag, massa? You might take him down a peg or two! Dat would be bully, see? You's bigger dan he, and powerful strong, I guesses. You isn't 'fraid, is you?"

"Caramba! Afraid of that left-handed Yankee? Not a bit. He's not my equal in anything!"

"Which am a fact," said Sambo. "He's a low-down Yankee—dat he is! He gib me a lick on de side of de head one day, and I hab not forgotten dat, you bet! Golly, I tink de side ob a house fall on me were he spatted me."

"I despise freaks of nature, and he is one," and the Cuban assumed an air of disdain.

"Weber mind, sar! You kin skate him down wid your long legs, if you like, dat's dead sure."

"Can't do it, my good fellow!"

"How's dat, sar?"

"I don't know how to skate. That is a part of my education which has been altogether neglected. I can swim like a fish, and dive like an otter, but I can't skate."

"Dat am funny—berry funny, sar! Even de little chillun skate in dis country."

"In mine we have no ice; hence my deficiency. But, see here, Sambo!"

"Yes, sar; I'se a listenin'!"

"How long is the skating course on the lake?"

"'Bout six miles, sar, right straight along. Call it twelve miles out and home."

"Manley will skim over that like a swallow, no doubt, eh?"

"You can gamble on dat, and win all de time."

"It strikes me there will be a flurry of snow before morning."

"What makes you tink dat, sar?"

"Because my barometer is going down."

"What you call de bayrumoter, sar?"

"Find out, you blazing donkey!" replied the Cuban. "It's a waste of time to talk to you."

"I'se a highly 'spectable man, sar!" protested the sable citizen, and he walked toward the door, as if to leave the room.

Diaz called him back.

"Do you want to earn fifty dollars without much trouble?" he asked.

"Dat is de kind ob cullud chief I is, Mr. Diaz. Show me de way, an' I'se your man for any scrap—I is!"

"Can I trust you, I wonder?"

"Wid your life an' good name, sar, wen dar's big money in it. Dat's me!"

"Well," continued the Spaniard, stolidly, "all you have to do to-morrow morning, to gain this big money, as you call it, is to take an axe and break a hole in the ice on the course, half a mile from the turning post. That's simple enough, isn't it?"

"Yes, sar; dat's all hunk!"

"It must be long enough and wide enough for a man to fall into; that or no pay."

"Dis chile takes de idea, persactly; I freezes to it—yah, yah!"

"And don't you put any danger signal up, either."

"Yah, yah. Dat would be fool business, for suah. Dis chile don't play fool dat way—no, sar!"

"All right, Sambo. We understand each other, I guess. Keep it all to yourself, and I'll have big fun while you have big money."

Sambo tapped his forehead in a wise manner.

"I'se mum as a mummy, Mars' Diaz," he said. "Dar will be a big hole in de ice to-morrow, and it don't matter to me who tumbles in."

Saying this, he left the apartment.

CHAPTER VI.

ACCIDENT TO PAT.

During the night a slight fall of snow took place, as the Cuban had predicted. It was only an inch thick, but this made it essential to sweep the course on the lake, and both Pat and Sambo set out early to do this work.

When they reached the spot which was marked with a stake as the point for starting, Sambo produced a full flask, the sight of which made the Irishman's mouth water and his eyes glisten.

"Phwat have you got there, naygur?" he asked.

"A sample ob good old Kentucky whisky, Irish, clar from Nelson County!" Sambo replied.

"Hand it over! Don't stand upon ceremony, ebony!"

"I may be off color, but I'se not ebony. But yar's de nectar from Kaintuck," and he extended the pint flash.

Pat lost no time in refreshing himself.

"You're unusually civil this mornin', Sambo," he remarked. "Where did you catch on to your good luck?"

"Dis chile feels sorter up in his spirits—dat's why! But, we has got to pitch in, Irish. Suppose you begin to sweep here and I'll go up to de top an' sweep down, an' meet you half way."

"Now you are talking! I don't care about the long walk. Toddle right along, nigger!"

"You was born lazy. I guesses dat runs in yer fambly scutcheon!"

"It's insulting me ye are. Is it pining for a fight ye be?"

"Not to-day, Irish. I'se too busy," and the darky shouldered his broom and walked up the lake.

The wind was blowing keenly from the northwest, and Pat began to sweep briskly to keep himself warm.

All at once he stopped and wiped the perspiration from his brow.

"That naygur," he muttered, "is up to some mischief, or he wouldn't be so accommodating. It's the first time I knew him to decline a tussle. I reckon I will follow him and find out what the knavery is."

With these words he followed after Sambo.

The darky did not turn his head, and the Irishman was unobserved.

"The black thafe! I'll have him," asseverated Pat.

The sun had now risen, and over the ice arose the mist of the evaporating snow, which rendered it difficult to distinguish objects even at a short distance.

Pat had followed in Sambo's footsteps, but these were soon lost, and the Irishman wandered aimlessly about on the ice. Had the "nectar from Kaintuck" got into his head?

An hour passed before the mist lifted at all; then came a spit of wind; the ice mist, for the moment, split apart, as it were, and showed him just where he was.

The sound of blows on the ice came to his hearing.

"What could it be?" he asked himself.

The wind pushed the mist before it, and soon he saw Sambo, a short way off, chopping away at the ice with a heavy hatchet.

Advancing over the now slippery surface of the lake, he started, when the wind almost wholly ceased, the mist banks closed again, and the haze was much denser than before.

Pat was like a man groping his way in the dark, for he almost at once lost his bearings.

"Sammy, me boy, where are you? For the love of the saints let me hear your gentle voice?" he called out.

There was no response, but the bewildered Irishman went onward—on until he fell, souse! into an ice hole and disappeared.

Sambo was not far away, evidently, for, as the Celt dropped from sight the "cullud chief" was heard to laugh, while he exclaimed:

"Whar's ye gwine to, Irish? Does you want to be food for fishes?"

Pat's head came to the surface, but the current which set through the lake was very strong, and the chances were against him.

"Save me!" he called out. "Be the powers, it's drowning I am."

Sambo rendered prompt assistance, and soon lifted him out on the sound ice.

Half-dead with cold and fright, the poor fellow was scarcely able to stand or walk.

"Ye spalpeen!" he chattered, "what ye after digging pits in the ice like that, for?"

"Golly," replied the darky, "it's none of my doing! I found that hole just as you see it, and nearly fell into it myself. Dis chile reckon somebody break de ice for de fish."

"It will make it dangerous for the skaters."

"Leab' it to me. I'll fix it by altering de course a bit."

"That will be all right."

"What are you doing up this way, anyhow?" asked Sambo, gruffly. "It's not your end to work on."

"I thought we would swape together bekase yez had a drop of the crathur wid ye."

"Oh, dat's de lay ob de lan', eh? Well, here's de flask, so take a guz, den git back where you came from."

"I'll have to go home, if I go anywhere," answered Pat, shivering. It was evident that he was in no condition to work.

"That's nice talking!" growled the negro. "Dat means I shall hab to do de job myself."

"Holy St. Patrick! It's spakin' the trooth I am!" and his teeth rattled like castinets as he spoke, while his whole frame shook violently.

They were not far from the left-hand side of the lake.

Here they saw the fire of two charcoal burners and the little wooden hut they lived in.

Sambo really was very much put out by the unwelcome appearance of the Irishman on that particular spot, for it might make his plans miscarry.

If Pat should meet any of the boys and tell them about the hole in the ice, they would avoid it, of course, and that would mean no fifty dollars for him and no getting even with the "low-down Yankee."

"Say, Irish," the wily African exclaimed, "I see dat you's real bad."

"It's no sham, be jabbers!" asseverated Pat.

"There's the charcoal burners ober dar. See? Now, you jes' drink up de rest ob de nectar, den go an' warm up by de fire and hab a sleep to yourself in de hut."

"That is sinsible advice. I'll take it. If I am enquired afther I'll thank you to tell what has happened me."

"Don't fret! You won't be missed. Do you tink de show can't go on widout you?"

Pat was too cold, ill, and miserable to make reply. At any other time he would have been ready for a ruction.

Sambo led over the ice to the charcoal burners' hut, where they were hospitably received.

The whisky and the heat of the fire soon make the Irishman sleepy, and though he was steaming wet, he sank into a sound slumber on some blankets in the hut.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SKATING DISASTER.

Thus rid of that drawback to his scheme, the darky went busily about the work of sweeping the track where any snow still remained, and by eleven o'clock he had finished the job, and the ice shone like glass in the sunshine.

An enterprising caterer of local renown had pitched a tent at the starting point, where he sold hot drinks and refreshments of a more solid nature, for a big crowd would gather there, and a thriving demand made on his stores.

The hole had been left in the track, and so smooth seemed the path that a rushing skater would not be likely to see it at all.

Should Joe Manley, as was expected, lead the race, he would surely be a victim to the Cuban's scheme and the negro's cunning.

There was only one of his school fellows at all likely to tie or beat the young prize winner, and that was Dick Garner, who was considered the best skater in the school, but Joe's magnificent reach and splendid action was expected by the knowing ones to beat even him.

There were a dozen starters.

Dick Garner was very popular; every one liked him, and his victory would give great pleasure, generally.

In a long race like this, it was a case of the survival of the fittest—that is to say, of the most enduring.

A large number of spectators had assembled, and at half past twelve a good start was effected.

Garner dashed off with the lead, with Left-Hand Joe close in his wake.

The rest followed in a straggling line.

The school boys who were not in the race rapidly pursued the contestants, but Joe Manley and Dick Garner soon were far away in the lead. The race lay between them alone.

Joe was several yards ahead when he neared the trap which Sambo had prepared.

In chopping the hole the negro had scattered the bits of ice right and left, but one of these had frozen fast well back on the track. Against this unperceived and unexpected obstruction Joe's right skate struck. His impetus was so great that the skates cut a "figure eight," and he toppled over on his side.

Before he could recover himself Dick Garner had shot by him like an arrow, or a homing pigeon nearing its cote, and so intent was he on his work, that he did not notice the rift in the ice.

Nor did he remark the presence, close by, of the Irishman, Pat, who having slept off the effect of his dip in the icy lake, recalled that spot of danger on the skating course. The thought of it aroused him, and he made his way as well as he could to the place.

There he stood, his arm raised like the warning on a signal post.

"Hi! look out!" he shouted, hoarsely, as the skater approached.

Garner heard the cry, but too late; he could not stop or swerve aside; the tremendous pace at which he was going prevented that.

A second more and—

He had plunged into the fatal hole and vanished from mortal ken!

The Irishman was too weak and frightened to even speak. He stood there as if dazed at the terrible tragedy.

When Dick Garner sank he did not rise again. The strong lake-current had caught him and borne him with it, far beneath the ice!

Joe Manley was put out of the race wholly. He had badly twisted his ankle; but at once slipping off his skate he hobbled ahead to reach the fatal rift.

At that moment Sambo passed him, and rushing up to Pat, he demanded:

"Who's gone down?"

"Young Garner," was the reply. "He hasn't come up again. Faith! he's drowned."

"If you say a word about me being up here dis morning, I'll knife you."

Sambo hissed rather than spoke his vicious threat, at the same time displaying an ugly knife.

"All right, naygur," replied Pat, "seein' it's a bad go; I'm dumb as an oyster."

"Keep so, or I'll hab you a corpus wherever you are!" asserted Sambo, vengefully.

Joe Manley now came up, and a crowd of others, and it was soon known that Dick Garner had gone down in the break in the ice.

"How did the hole come here?" asked Joe, earnestly.

"That is the question," said Fred.

"My God!" continued Joe. "If I had not gone a cropper over something on the track, back there, I should have been where Garner is, poor fellow!"

"Thar's been some one fishin', sah!" Sambo remarked, "dat's a suah thing; dis is a fishin' hole."

"I guess that is it," replied Left-Hand Joe. "Did you see any one about here, Pat?"

"The charcoal burners was dropping lines for lake bass, I suppose. They fetch a good price this time of year," the Irishman suggested, evasively, as Sambo's glaring eye was upon him.

The skating match was over. The sport had ended in a great calamity—a noble life had gone out.

Drags were procured; the ice was broken in many places under the direct

current, and late in the afternoon the dead body of the unfortunate Dick Garner was recovered.

A deep gloom fell upon the school; the boys, the teachers, the community, all felt the presence of a distressful sorrow.

This was not lifted until after the funeral, which took place in a few days.

Then the boys began to recover their wonted spirits, and events resumed their usual course.

Alfonso, as ever, pretended to be Joe Manley's admiring friend, and feelingly congratulated him upon his narrow escape from that death-hole.

But, on the day of the tragedy, he wrote to Paul Panton, in these words:

"I am sorry to inform you that our mutual aversion has foiled me again. He escaped the snare I laid for him, and I am at a loss to know what to do next. Will you come and see me or advise me by mail?"

The reply to the epistle was, "I will come down very soon."

CHAPTER VII.

SAMBO'S VOW.

The Cuban was not disliked in the school.

His lavish expenditure had made him many friends. Notably among these was a tall young man named Engel, who was so thin that he resembled a weed run to seed.

Engel would do anything to serve Alfonso Diaz.

"You will have to postpone your bicycle ride," he said to the Cuban as they were out walking one morning. All trace of the frost had disappeared.

There had been rain, the roads were muddy, but the wind was balmy.

"Why so?" asked Alfonso.

"Two important events in our scholastic life are coming off soon," from Engel.

"What are they?"

"Haven't you heard?"

"Not a word. The school twaddle does not interest me. I wish I was back in Havana."

"Why did you come here?"

"Why, father thought a few months of American college life would polish me."

"I am sure you do not require that."

"Do you think so?"

"My dear fellow, you are a perfect gentleman in every way," assured Engel.

The flattery pleased Alfonso. He liked praise. Removing a valuable ring from his finger, the Cuban presented it to the flatterer.

"Wear it," he said.

"I shall be robbing you," was urged.

"Not in the least. There are more where that came from."

Engel's eyes sparkled with pleasure.

It was indeed a handsome gift.

"Thank you very much. I will keep it for your sake, and I wish you all the luck you deserve in the two events I was going to tell you about."

"Oh, yes; go ahead. I don't suppose it will interest me very much, but at the same time I should like to hear."

"It surely will interest you. In the first place, Mr. Durand, the French fencing master, is coming here to-night, and all those in the school who have learned fencing are to compete for a pair of silver foils."

"Can I be in that?"

"Certainly, if you wish to. The en-

trance fee is only five dollars, and any fellow in the school can go in for the prize, whether he has taken lessons or not."

Alfonso's eyes sparkled. He prided himself on his skill as a swordsman.

"I will enter," he decided, "and without boasting, I don't think there is any one who can beat me."

"Are you a good hand at it?"

"I am called an expert."

"Your rival, Joe Manley, has put his name down, and there are but half a dozen others in the contest."

"Count me in."

"The other event will take place to-morrow. A second eleven of Columbia College is coming down here to play us a game of football, and you are mentioned as half back."

"I have no objection to taking that on, though I suppose Manley will be captain of our team."

"No, Carter is the captain. He's a heavy weight, but a good player."

"So is Manley, from all accounts."

"None better, but he won't play on our side at all."

"That is curious."

"Let me explain."

"I want to know," and the Cuban quite dropped his usual apathy.

"This is a friendly game," continued Engel. "The Columbia men are all old pupils of Dr. Cramer's."

"Is that so?"

"They were prepared at this school for Columbia College, and they happen to be one man short of the eleven."

"That is strange."

"Not at all. He was taken suddenly sick."

"What are they going to do without him?"

"Joe Manley has volunteered to take his place."

"In that case he will play against us."

"Most decidedly."

The Cuban laughed in a peculiar manner.

"I do not know much of the game," he said, "though I have played it, and I am aware of the fact that a severe kick can be given on the shins when two men meet."

"That is what they call 'bucking' in the Rugby game," observed Engel.

"Do you play that or the Association game? But it does not matter; when a fellow runs with the ball you can easily get a kick at him."

"That will be your chance to make Manley remember you, if you want to."

The Cuban's eyes glistened.

"You need not doubt that."

"You hate him?"

"Like poison."

"Well, if it is worth anything, I will put you up to a trick or two and give you a few pointers."

"You shall not find me ungrateful."

Engel evidently wanted to make trouble. He did not like Manley, for Joe had snubbed him considerably.

"It is about time you did something to vindicate yourself, for Left-Hand Joe and his friend, Fred Standish, are always calling you down behind your back."

"What do they say?" asked Alfonso.

"They term you a Cuban fraud, and declare that you would run a mile at the sight of a true-blue Spaniard."

"Carrajo! I would not run a yard before two Americans like them."

He spoke bitterly—viciously.

"We had better begin with a fencing match, as that takes place first."

"By all means."

"You will challenge Manley this evening to pit himself against you?"

"Yes, that must be arranged, and if I don't—"

"Stop!" interrupted Engel. "Of course you will beat him, and I am going to tell you how to do so."

"Proceed! I am listening."

"Each of you will have a second. Manley's will be sure to be Fred Standish. I will act in the same capacity for you."

"What good will that do?"

"Wait till I tell you. Here comes in one of the points I alluded to."

"I hope I shall be able to make use of it."

"You will wear a mask of wire to protect your face and a doublet of leather to save the body from being injured."

"Bah!" said the Cuban, impatiently. "Every child knows that."

"Perhaps you don't know what I am going to say next."

"How should I when I have not heard?"

"The point of the foil is sharp enough to pierce through the leather jerkin, but in fencing it is tipped with a button, but if the button gets off from the foil the body will be pierced. See?"

"When the button is properly fixed on it is not at all likely to come off."

Engel lowered his voice to a whisper.

"I can remove the button from your foil as I hand it to you," he intimated.

The Cuban grasped him by the hand.

"Good! Very good! That will be the plan!"

"Of course, if anything should happen to Manley it will be regarded as an accident."

"Quite so; it could not be otherwise."

They looked at one another and laughed.

The two conspirators retraced their steps to the school, and to their surprise discovered Sambo close behind them.

He had been near enough to hear what had been said.

Had he been listening? They did not think so, for his face wore the look of seeming innocence and indifference.

"Where are you off to, you ace of spades?" asked the Cuban. Sambo grinned as he answered:

"Jes' gwine to fetch at lazy Irish Pat, dat Massa Cramer sent to post a letter two hours ago."

"What is he wanted for?"

"To help put de gymnasium right for fencing. Mounseer Durand is come for de fencing matches, and dis chile ain't going to do all the work by hisself."

At that moment Pat was seen coming round the corner of the big building, in an unsteady gait which showed that he had been imbibing too freely.

The two conspirators stepped aside to watch the fun which they thought would ensue.

"Say, Irish, whar you been to git dat load?" Sambo demanded.

"Phwat business is it of yours?" was the retort.

"Don't be ugly."

"I'll lay yez out in rale Tipperary style if you don't hould your pace."

"Would you be mad now if I offered you my arm to steady your legs?"

"To China wid yer arm! I will show you how to take mine wid a fist on it!"

Sambo stepped back, but not quickly enough to avoid the heavy blow of that fist, and down he went!

But he was up again in a moment.

"If it is foighting ye want, I will accommodate yez till further orders, be me sowl, I will!"

For answer the now irate Sambo low-

ered his head for his mode of attack—by butting—but the Irishman seemed to understand that mode of warfare, so, by a quick kick on the negro's shins he sent Sambo rolling on his back across the path toward the young men.

The Cuban, with an inborn contempt for Sambo, despite the service the darky had rendered him, gave him a contemptuous spurn with his foot.

Sambo bounded to his feet in a moment, now "mad all through," seeing that all were apparently against him. He did not tarry, but hastened away, and as he went ominous words broke from his lips:

"I'll be revenged on de whole lot," he muttered. "On dat Cuban, too! I'll make him feel dis chille's spite, dat I will!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CUBAN'S FOUL PLAY.

Once within the big building, Sambo sought out Joe Manley and found him and Fred Standish practicing with the foils in the gymnasium.

Drawing Joe to one side, he informed him that he had a secret of importance.

"You'se got a very bad man for an enemy, sah, and he's going to do you to-night," was Sambo's information.

"Speak out, Sambo. Who is the enemy and what is his game?" Left-Hand Joe demanded to know.

"Massa Diaz is de man dat's layin' fer you, Massa Joe. I heard him say dat to-night he would fence wid you; dat de button would come off de foil, and he stick you like a pig."

"Oh, that is the Spaniard's new game, is it? Well, I am glad you have told me. I shall be on my guard."

"He's sure to do it, sah; he try to kill you once before."

"Ha! when was that?"

"If you tink de hole in de ice war cut by de Irishman, you is bery much mistaken. Dat Cuban knows what he's about. Yah! yah! and showing his ivory white teeth, Sambo retired.

"What's the nigger up to?" asked Fred.

"He has given me information about a new plot," replied Joe.

"Anything serious?"

"Alfonso is going to fence with me to-night, using a buttonless foil, and if I don't look out I shall be wounded."

"Don't fence with him, then," suggested Fred.

"Yes, I will. A double-breasted jacket will protect me, and you will see how I will baffle and expose him, the scoundrel, for such I now begin to believe him!"

"I'll watch the second while you attend to the principal, for both must be in such a scheme," averred Fred.

No more was said about the affair, but Left-Hand Joe was prepared for his enemy.

Not many of the boys had learned fencing, so the contest did not excite much interest. Scarcely a dozen spectators were present at the contest with the foils.

Monsieur Durand, an active little Frenchman, was very busy over his preparations for the bout.

Four events of minor importance were disposed of before the rivals took position.

The champions were well matched to all appearances. They saluted; then crossed blades.

For a time there was pretty sword play on both sides, without either of them scoring a point or touch.

At length the Cuban lunged en carte, and his foil became deeply embedded in his opponent's jacket!

So firmly did it stick fast that Alfonso could not or did not withdraw it.

Durand stepped forward; he seized the foil and pushed the Cuban back.

"Mon Dieu!" he cried, "there is something wrong! Ze button shall come off ze foil!"

Fred Standish had not been an idle observer.

He had seen Engel touch the tip of the foil as he handed it to Alfonso, and, as the fellow had had no opportunity to throw the button away, if he had removed it Fred knew that it must still be in Engel's left hand.

Instantly he seized that hand, and forcing it open, displayed the missing button hidden in the palm.

"Here it is!" he exclaimed. "It was removed for a purpose."

To the relief of every one, Joe undid his doublet and showed that he was unhurt.

The Cuban endeavored to explain and apologize, but no one would listen to him.

It was well known that for some unknown reason there was enmity between him and Manley, though that the Spaniard really meant to seriously injure his antagonist no one would believe.

Diaz and his second retired from the room in disgrace, their departure being marked with hisses, while Joe was overwhelmed with congratulations on his escape.

"You managed that badly. Why didn't you throw the button away?" demanded the Cuban as the two entered his room.

"I hadn't the chance. Standish had his eye on me like a lynx all the time," replied Engel.

"Do you think they suspected something?"

"I am sure they did. I think that nigger Sambo must have overheard some of our talk and told Joe Manley or Fred about it; but don't let us worry over that. We must show those two sharpers what we can do on the football field to-morrow. I'm not to be beaten by Fred Standish, and you must not be beaten by Joe Manley. It is war to the knife now."

"Well, Engel, I say war to the knife, too!" and the Cuban's eyes gleamed venomously.

Engel produced from his pocket a toe-cap. It was of copper, but was covered with fine leather, and would fit any boot of ordinary size.

"Asking Diaz to hold out his right leg, he fitted the cap on to his heavy lace shoe in a manner that rendered it almost imperceptible.

"What is this machine for?" asked the Spaniard.

"I had them made for economy sake to preserve the toe of the shoe from wear out on the rough roads," explained Engel. "but you will find the cap good enough to break Left-Hand Joe's leg with when you come in contact with him to-morrow, that is sure."

"If that is found out, like the buttonless foil, I shall get into trouble, for certain."

"Pshaw! Who is to find out?"

"Well, I must take the risk, and do my best to beat the Columbia boys to-morrow, for that is what we are in the game for, eh?"

"Just so; in the game to win!"

Next day there was a good deal of talk in the school about the pending match.

The day was all that could be desired,

There was a moist air, but an absence of frost, and the ground was very good.

The match was to begin at twelve o'clock, and to last until one.

A large number of spectators assembled to witness the event. Joe Manley certainly was an acquisition to the visitors, and it seemed hard upon the school to part with him.

The captain of the Columbia team, named Shaw, was a young man of medium size, and a very fast runner, as well as an expert kicker—in fact, a good all-round foot ball player.

The ball was thrown down as the clock struck twelve, and after a little maneuvering Manley caught and ran with it.

The Cuban at once got in position to stop him.

Manley was well backed up by Shaw.

When close to Alfonso, Joe unaccountably slipped and fell on one knee.

Shaw bounded forward, grasped the ball, which he tore from his hand, and ran on.

The Cuban had aimed a kick at Manley, but, owing to his rival's fall, he missed him, but Shaw received the full force of the blow.

There was a loud cry as the captain of the Columbias sank to the ground, wholly knocked out—unable to move.

The copper cap on the heavy shoe had done its fell work; for the captain of the Columbia team had his leg broken.

This put an end to the play immediately.

The captain was carried off the field on a stretcher, amid much sympathy.

The Cuban pretended to be very sorry, and so succeeded in this case in covering up the secret of the accident that no one of the players or spectators guessed the fact—that the copper toe-cap had got in its work.

That the Spaniard smothered a curse when the blow intended for Manley had been received by another goes without saying.

Joe Manley seemed to bear a charmed life, for he came out victorious every time, which only added to the rage of the vindictive conspirator and schemer.

CHAPTER IX.

JOE'S TRICK ON THE CUBAN.

The fire of hatred and malice was smouldering, but was far from being extinguished.

It was growing toward the end of the term and the examinations were coming on—the season when the most idle and indifferent among the boys apply themselves to their studies, to make up for lapses during the term.

But there was one, Alfonso Diaz, who was an exception to the rule.

The Cuban was moody and silent, taking long walks, and spending much of his time in a billiard room. He had long since ceased to be a favorite, while the champion, Left-Hand Joe, was the idol of the fellows.

One evening in November the first-class boys were assembled in their private room.

Alfonso, still anxious as ever to keep friends with all, had placed half a dozen packets of cigarettes on the table, so that any one could help himself.

"I've bought a new high-grade bike," he announced, as a matter of interest, and as showing what his ample means could do. "It cost me a pretty high figure, too."

"Oh, have you? and how are you getting on with mastering it?" queried Joe.

"Fairly. It is a new kind of machine

to me. We do not use them much in Cuba."

"Do not, eh? Are the roads so bad there?"

"That may have something to do with it, but they don't appeal to a Cuban's imagination, or fancy, or taste. A man on a wheel is a strange combination of horse and rider," Alfonso answered.

"I thought that you would get civilized before you had been here long," Joe suggested, rather ironically.

"Don't flatter yourself, my dear fellow, as to the superiority of your civilization, as you call it."

"I'm not going to; it is not flattery, but fact."

"Oh, is it? Well, as a Cuban, I assert that I can do anything that an American can do."

"Can you, indeed?" satirically.

"Tell me one thing that I can't or daren't do!" he exclaimed.

"Well, for one thing, you dare not ride from here to Northport in a convict suit," suggested Joe, banteringly.

"Pah! what is that? Any one can do that!" and the Cuban laughed derisively. "As we almost always masquerade at balls in Cuba, why not do so on the high road on a bicycle?"

"I will bet you fifty dollars you don't dare do it!"

"Done! I'll cover that bet!"

"To-morrow at twelve o'clock I will start. You must provide the suit."

"That can be readily prepared or procured at a costumer's. You shall have it in time, if you really mean to make the trial."

"Mean it? Didn't I say I would do it? That means I'll win your money!"

When Joe and Fred Standish were alone together the latter inquired why his friend had made such a strange wager.

"Just to have some fun out of the boaster," Joe answered. "The idea came into my head yesterday when I was out walking. Along the fences and dead walls I saw a printed notice to this effect:

"POLICE HEADQUARTERS.

"NOTICE.

"\$50 Reward.

"Whereas, A convict named Bill Batt has escaped from the Penitentiary, stealing the Warden's bicycle, he is supposed to be hiding in the woods.

"The above reward will be paid to any one who will bring the aforesaid Bill Batt to the nearest station."

"See the joke now?" asked Joe, laughing.

"Yes, I see, and it is a capital scheme. Push it along by all means. It will give the Spaniard a new idea of American civilization. Ha! ha!"

"Just my intention. There is heaps of fun in it," resumed the athlete. "Everybody will take the Cuban for the escaped convict, because he will wear the striped clothes and ride a bike."

"Exactly; he will have a lively time to escape arrest. Your fifty is safe, I guess."

"Perfectly safe, with the trimmings thrown in!" and the two friends hugely enjoyed the prospect.

Precisely at the hour appointed Diaz started on his new bicycle to ride to Northport from Flushing.

He had a good send-off, and all the fellows cheered lustily.

His tall form, attired in convict's clothes, made him look peculiar. Any one would have taken him for an escaped convict.

Left-Hand Joe and Fred Standish went by the train to Northport.

Should he do the distance without interruption, they meant to make it merry for him on his arrival. The local police would be on the lookout for him.

As there was no time limit, Alfonso did not force the pace.

Slung behind him, a light overcoat was rolled up. This would hide his convict garb, should he wish to stop on the way.

No cap was on his head, which was thus fully exposed.

All went well until, on the road between Flushing and Jamaica, he encountered two men, who ordered him to stop.

Although the police posters were strewn along the route, the Cuban had failed to notice them.

At the command the Cuban slacked up and got off his wheel.

"What do you want?" he demanded.

"Where did you come from?" asked one.

"That's what we want to know," added the other.

"In what way does my business concern you?" he demanded. "This is a public road, and I am riding on it."

"You are the man!"

"I don't understand."

"Oh, don't you, Mister Bill Batt?" was the rejoinder. "You are caught, and you will have to come with us."

The Cuban's eyes flashed fiercely.

Dropping his machine and advancing, he hit out right and left, and in the fight which ensued the two got decidedly the worst of it.

He tipped them over like ninepins, and after two or three rises they lay on their backs completely used up.

Diaz had not escaped without some slight injuries, but he remounted and spun away, supposing that he really had been beset by highwaymen.

When nearing Jamaica he donned his overcoat, and halted at a hotel for refreshment and rest.

But sharp observers were there, at the bar, when he entered, having left his machine leaning against the wall outside.

They eyed him curiously, for there yet was blood on his face, showing that he had been in an affray.

The loungers began to whisper to one another, and, not pleased at such scrutiny, he moved away to the door to make another start.

"Here!" exclaimed one of the men, "don't be in such a hurry. Show us what you have got under your coat."

The Cuban laughed.

"Oh! that is nothing. I am riding for a wager," he explained.

"You've got convict's dress on. Where did you steal the bike?"

"Don't be insolent to me, or you will regret it."

"Not I! You're Bill Batt, for whom there is a reward, and I mean to nail you."

Bill Batt again! Who was Bill Batt? It was clearly a case of mistaken identity.

"Let me pass, or you will be sorry for it," the wheelman cried. "I am well known in Flushing."

"And in Kings county jail, too, I guess," was the retort.

"Stand back, you loafers! Don't bar my way, I warn you!"

"Hold up your hands and surrender, Bill Batt."

"I'll batt you," cried the Cuban, and he "squared off" to fight his way out.

Not an easy task, but he did not wait.

One man dashed this way, another

that, and after a free give and take, Diaz got outside.

Then to mount his bike and dash away was but the work of a moment.

In the struggle his overcoat had been torn from his back, and he was again a full-fledged convict!

The people in the street howled at him, but he speeded the machine and was soon out of sight.

"Bill Batt!" rang in his ear.

Stones had been thrown and shots fired at him.

If it had not been for the bet and his costume he would have turned back and taken a train home.

CHAPTER X.

JOE'S FIGHT WITH A BEAR.

Everything comes to an end in time, and so did his journey.

The hospitable town of Northport hove in sight.

Outside the leading hotel a large crowd had collected.

Among them were a squad of six policemen, and foremost in the throng were Joe Manley and Fred Standish!

They had industriously circulated the news that, from private information which they had, Bill Batt, the escaped convict, would arrive at about two o'clock, and further stated that Batt intended to brazen the thing out; he might assert that he was riding a wheel in prison dress for a bet—that he was a gentleman, well connected, and not a criminal.

Thus had the jokers prepared for Alfonso's arrival, and that the arrogant Cuban did not anticipate such a reception as that which awaited him may well be surmised.

An Italian with a performing bear was reaping a rich harvest of nickels, when, tired and weary, Diaz came up. A loud yell arose from the public, at his appearance.

"That's him!" cried one.

"Bill Batt, for a dollar!" averred another.

"Seize him!" shouted a third.

The Cuban stopped and got off his machine.

What did this demonstration mean?

He could not make it out, at all, and was greatly puzzled.

As soon as he alighted he was grasped by two of the men in blue, while others stood over him with brandished clubs.

"Railroad the burglar!" exclaimed a bystander.

"Send him up for life," shouted another. "Our lives and property are not safe while such fellows are about."

The Spaniard became furious.

"What on earth are you men doing?" he demanded.

"You are the escaped convict, Bill Batt, from Kings county penitentiary," answered the officer.

"The deuce I am!"

"Our information is beyond doubt. You are my prisoner. I arrest you, in the name of the law."

"Which you will be sorry for. I am a gentleman from Cuba."

"Why don't you say from Hong Kong or Hell Gate?"

"Fool!" cried Alfonso, "I am a pupil at Sea View Academy, Flushing, and am riding in this outlandish costume for a wager."

"Oh, that won't work! We know better. Come to the lock-up."

"I will make you pay for this, officer!"

"Go softly, Bill Batt," warned the policeman.

Just as the proud Spaniard, to his great indignation, was going to be dragged off

ignominiously to the lock-up, he espied Joe and Fred.

The boys could not help grinning at his awkward and unpleasant predicament. It was a "big one" on him.

"Look!" exclaimed Diaz, eagerly. "There are two friends of mine. We are pupils together at Sea View Academy."

"That remains to be proved."

Turning to Joe, the officer continued:

"Do you know this fellow, sir?"

"No. I never saw him before in my life," answered Joe, coolly.

"Then you cannot corroborate his assertion?"

"Certainly not."

This settled the matter.

"March!" exclaimed the officer.

"Grand Dios!" muttered the Islander.

"What is the world coming to? If this is a joke, it is a pretty rough one."

He was hurried off to the station house, in spite of his protestations, and there placed in a cell, where, of course, he fretted like a caged panther.

Meanwhile, Joe and Fred were intensely amused; their trick had succeeded beyond their most sanguine anticipations.

"What are you going to do now?" inquired Fred.

"Let him take his chances," answered the athlete.

"And leave him in durance vile?"

"Why not? Hasn't he treated me to too many doses of his insolence? All his pretended friendship is canting humbug, as I very well know; so let him wriggle!"

"Well, he will soon get out."

"Of course. All he has to do is to wire to Mr. Crammer, who will send Mr. Terror, the second master, here to identify and liberate him."

"That is so; therefore, let us have some dinner," suggested Fred.

The crowd, satisfied by the capture of the supposed Bill Batt, was beginning to disperse.

The bear and its keeper had ceased to attract, and Bruin was restless and in bad humor, made evident by the gleam in his usually dull eyes.

With a sudden jerk he snatched the chain from his leader's hand and was free.

Joe Manley, at the moment, was passing.

"Stoppa ma beara!" yelled the Italian, appealing to him.

"I'm not bear-hunting to-day, thank you!" was the reminder from the athlete.

The bear, however, was man-hunting, for at once he made a spring at Joe and clasped him round the chest with his brawny paws.

The wildest excitement prevailed. Some stood by to look on; others ran away to a safe distance.

Joe found the bear's hug was as bad as that of the anaconda, and with the greatest difficulty he released his formidable left arm.

Then the athlete delivered several sledge-hammer blows, which made Bruin shake his head, but not to release his hold. Rather it made the beast hug all the closer and fiercer.

Joe was losing his breath every moment, but now, with a desperate effort, he tore the bear's paws asunder and was free.

Then retreating a few steps, that terrible left hand was brought into practice again, and with one crushing, tremendous hit he broke the brute's jaw!

This caused Bruin to roll on the ground, in real agony.

"Ma beara!" sobbed the Italian; "who paya me?"

"Not I! You should look after him better," replied Joe.

"Paya me! Feefty dolla!"

"Not a red cent! I should have you arrested for having such a beast in your keeping, so you had better make yourself scarce."

Saying this, Joe took Fred's arm and went into the hotel, where they had dinner.

CHAPTER XI.

JOE LEAVES THE SCHOOL.

It was dark when they arrived at the school.

They were informed that the Cuban had come back before them.

As they had imagined, he had telegraphed, and Mr. Terror, the second master, had gone to Northport at once, and his appearance soon put matters right and got him out of the scrape.

But he had made a complaint, and Joe was told that Mr. Crammer wanted to see him at once.

Left-Handed Joe wondered why on earth the Principal wanted to "carpet him," as the boys called an interview with Mr. Crammer in his private study.

Pat conducted him to the room in which Mr. Crammer spent most of his time when not in the recitation room.

"What's the matter with the boss?" he asked.

"You've got an enemy in this house, sorr," replied the Irishman.

"Well I know it."

"Thin, bedad, it is no use for me to mention his name."

"Not in the least. You refer to Mr. Diaz?"

"That's the man. Don't breathe a word, but I've heard more than you think for."

Joe stopped short in the middle of the hall.

"Speak out," he commanded.

"I don't want to, sorr."

"What do you know?" cried Joe, peremptorily. "Speak out or I will hammer the life out of you!"

"Holy Vargin!"

"Stop that! You have said a little, but not enough."

"Well, sorr, I'll confess that it has come to my knowledge that Signor Diaz is your deadly foe, and from what I have heard, Sambo dug the hole in the ice."

"As I suspected."

"It was meself that saw him do it."

"At the Cuban's suggestion, I understand. My life is not safe. But, can you tell me why Mr. Crammer wishes to see me?"

"Diaz has made a complaint, your honor."

"What about?"

"That queer ride to Northport you gave the Cuban."

"Is he disturbed over it?"

"Hopping mad's the word. He swears that he will have you punished for it—publicly disgraced."

"All right!" said Joe. "I am much obliged to you, Pat, for your information."

"I'm rale plased to serve a gintleman born like yerself," answered Pat.

Joe had learned all he wanted.

Going to the Principal's door, he knocked, and hearing the prompt "Come!" he entered.

Mr. Crammer was seated at a table.

To his surprise Joe saw that Mr. Paul Panton was standing opposite him.

Paul Panton was a harbinger of mis-

chief; whenever he appeared trouble was sure to follow.

"You requested my presence here, sir," from Joe Manley, and manly he looked at that moment—every inch a soldier and an athlete, born and bred.

"Yes," replied Mr. Crammer; "you have been playing a practical joke upon Senor Diaz."

"I admit it, frankly."

"This kind of thing tends to bring my academy into notoriety which amounts to disgrace," severely from the "Prox."

"I cannot see it in that light."

"You will have to, if you listen to reason."

Joe looked at him unflinchingly. "Be good enough to say what you want," and he sat down facing the two.

"The trick you played on Alfonso Diaz is not at all creditable to you. I disapprove of such conduct. He has made a complaint and I am bound to take cognizance of it, as Principal of this reputable old school. I cannot ignore it."

"Well, doctor, what is your decision—what is to be the penalty?"

"This. You must be confined to the house for the remainder of the term."

Joe could not help smiling.

"With all due respect to you, sir," he returned, "I must decline your proposition."

"You refuse to obey my orders?"

"Just that, doctor. I will spare you all further responsibility or trouble, for in half an hour I shall have packed up and left Seaview."

This declaration astounded the Principal. He had not expected such independence, nor such a loss to his school.

Carelessly he arose and walked toward the door.

"Stay, rash boy!" cried Doctor Crammer.

"No, sir!" replied Joe. "I have the pleasure of wishing you good evening, doctor!" and the door closed behind him.

CHAPTER XII.

BOUND FOR A SEA VOYAGE.

"Go after him, Mr. Panton!" ordered the Principal. "You represent his guardian, do you not?"

"Assuredly I do."

"In that case you must have some influence or authority over him."

"Such as I have I will use."

"Do so, I pray, and I hope with a good result."

Paul Panton overtook Joe in the hall, where he had paused to speak with the Irishman.

"Pack my trunk, and hurry up with it to the hotel. Tell Mr. Standish where I am going," he gave orders.

"Yis, sorr; I will do it in double quick time."

Putting on his overcoat and hat, Joe let himself out of the front door.

Not until Joe was at the bottom of the stoop did Panton venture to address him.

For some reason Panton was not desirous of speaking to him in the house.

He touched him gently on the shoulder, when the young athlete turned upon his guardian's secretary.

"Can I talk to you, Joe?" asked Mr. Panton.

"With pleasure, sir."

"I thought you would not refuse me, as I have always been your friend."

"I know nothing to the contrary."

"Mr. Cramer has wired to your guardian, Mr. Hardy, stating that there was some trouble in the school, and requesting him to come down."

"The trouble is made by Alfonso

Diaz. He is a treacherous hound, and I have not given him half what I mean to. If he crosses my path again I will pay up the full score I have against him."

"Have you really made up your mind to leave the school?"

"Certainly I have."

"Come back to the city with me," urged the secretary.

"That will not suit me at present."

"What do you intend to do?"

"Take a sea voyage, perhaps, for the benefit of my health," with a light laugh.

"Let us talk the matter over," said Mr. Panton seriously. "I will be your friend and guide if you will allow me."

"Very well; come to the hotel and have supper with me. I will stay there to-night, at any rate."

Paul Panton expressed his thanks, and they walked on, side by side.

At the hotel a cozy private room was given to them, and supper was speedily provided.

In the middle of the meal the waiter announced that Joe's trunk had arrived. At the same time Fred Standish walked in. He was, of course, invited to sit down and make himself at home, which he did, without hesitation.

"What's all the fuss about?" he asked.

It did not take Joe long to tell him.

"Do you blame me?" he asked.

"No; I should have done the same thing myself."

"It's a go this time," declared the other.

"Shall you not return to Seaview Academy?"

"Never! I want to get away from it for more reasons than one."

"If that is the case, you must take me with you. We are chums, and cannot be parted, unless you say the word," avowed the good fellow.

"There is no reason why we should be, if that really is your wish. I've decided on a cruise—a real sea cruise, Fred, so if we stick together I dare say we'll have oceans of fun out of it."

"And work for a living, is that your idea? To ship as a sailor?"

"Yes, we will have to work, I suppose, for want of money, as I don't suppose my guardian will give me any, since I have left the school without his knowledge or consent."

"Not a penny!" assured Paul Panton, sententiously.

"Sure of that?" from Fred.

"I know him too well; he is a strict disciplinarian—an upright, honorable man."

"That is more than his beautiful nephew, the Cuban, is."

"Of him I know but little," declared Panton.

"And I know a good deal, enough to request that his name is not mentioned in my presence."

"By all means," assented Panton. "I have no regard for him. But I want to talk to you upon the subject you mentioned just now."

The two mates regarded him with attention.

"Boys," with a fatherly air, "I think I can be of use to you in this fix."

"Don't be modest, sir," answered Joe.

"We are taking all the help we can get for this venture for adventure. It is a strike for fun, for excitement, for anything that will keep the pot boiling. See?"

"Ah, yes; I see, and I am pleased at your spirit. If it is real excitement and

adventure with a little danger you want I can put you in the way of just the very thing. But, boys, it must be a dead secret, for it is contraband—against the law."

"We will not breathe a word to anybody, of course, even if we do not freeze to your idea," assured Joe. "Now, what is the scheme?"

"Well, it is to cruise on a craft given to smuggling—to running the gantlet of the revenue officers, and, when in close quarters, having to fight your way out. It is a right jolly life, with a right jolly crew, and sometimes has big money in it. So, that is the scheme. How does it strike you?"

"I'm in it," from Joe, "if it is fun, excitement, and prize money."

"So am I," from Fred, "if it don't get us into the lockup."

"Oh, no fear of that. Plenty of people, even on our first-class steamers—first-class people, too—smuggle everything they can, diamonds, laces, dresses, jewelry, art works—everything they can. They are at it all the time, so there is no particular crime in it. It is only dodging the Customs officers to save paying the Government's exorbitant duties—merely enforcing free trade," urged the wily Paul, insinuatingly.

Then to prevent further questioning, or perhaps argument, he proceeded to explain that the vessel on which they would ship was then near at hand—out in the Sound off Flushing Harbor, in fact—which was a surprise to the boys.

"When can we go on board?" asked Joe.

"I will arrange it for to-morrow morning. You shall mess with the captain, whom I expect to meet here to-night."

"Bravo!" cried Joe.

"That is good luck," added Fred.

Mr. Panton further stated that the smuggler's ship was named "Fly by Night," and was, in reality, the property of Mr. Hardy. Her captain's name was Brooks.

Mr. Hardy had told Paul Panton to order Captain Brooks to proceed to Atlantic City, where their agents would be waiting for him. Captain Brooks was due at the hotel some time during that evening.

Once on board the "Fly by Night" Captain Brooks, of course, would have the boys completely in his power. That was the happy chance for which the wily secretary had been waiting; now a lucky fate had seemingly placed Joe Manley right in his power!

The fowler had spread his net and caught his kingbird!

CHAPTER XIII.

FIRST NIGHT ON BOARD.

At ten o'clock Captain Brooks arrived.

The two school insubordinates were introduced to him by Panton, who explained their wishes and plans to break away from school life.

This pleased the captain, for he smiled approvingly at the boys' decision.

"You may have a little excitement on board my ship, gentlemen," he said.

"That is what we are going to ship with you for," admitted the young athlete.

"You'll have to work lively for your grub. We have no accommodation for mere passengers, you understand. Our cargo, at this time of the year is Little Neck clams and oysters," and he smiled at his seeming joke. "Do you lads know anything about a ship?" he asked.

"Only what we have read."

"Then that's too little salt for the chowder," said the captain with a broad grin.

"Oh, that will be all right," asserted Panton. "They'll be comfortable, and you will treat them not as common sailors, but as friends of mine."

"He ought to," intimated Joe, "considering I am Mr. Hardy's nephew and he is the owner of the ship."

"Oh, we shan't fall out," replied Captain Brooks.

"You seem well made and shipshape. You will have to shin up the shrouds and keep watch."

"Yes, sir; of course—do our share of duty. That is understood."

"In return for which you will have a jolly sea skit, and get your pork and beans."

"That will do for us," said Joe. "We are not crazed for a life on the ocean wave; far from it. I have a fortune coming to me, so there is no necessity for me to adopt any profession or to drop into the fore-castle as a scrub-deck sailor."

"Yes, I understand, boys. You ship to have a good outing. You shall have it. The work will be easy, and I'll make it mighty lively at times, and you'll see life you never saw before."

This pleased the boys greatly, and when they "turned in" that night, sleeping in the same room, they had visions of a glorious adventure to make them happy.

Paul Panton and Captain Brooks were left together, each with a punch bowl before them, for further conference, as we shall see.

"Going aboard to-night?" asked Panton.

"Not if I know it. This is a snug harbor for a sailor."

"Good enough. Stay here. You are welcome."

"I'm on easy road, I tell you, in this room, when you think what a stormy night it is outside."

"All the better. I wish to talk to you."

"Sail in. Scuppers are open."

"Here are your instructions for the agents in Philadelphia, who will meet you at Atlantic City," handing the captain a packet which he put in his pocket.

"Anything else?" he queried.

"Yes, fill up your glass and make yourself at home."

Brooks did so without demur.

"Did you note well that tall athletic young fellow, Joe Manley?"

"Yes, of course. He's a chap to take note of, anywhere; but I think we have a fellow on board the 'Fly By Night' who can knock spots out of him if they should have a falling out."

"Describe your man."

"He's about the same height as this Manley, perhaps somewhat stouter in build, with muscles like steel wire. He's as straight as a pine tree and can knock a hole with his fist in a one-inch plank."

"Pretty good that, but Manley can beat him."

"That ain't likely. No one can do that, or I miss my reckoning. Why do you think it?"

"Manley is a trained athlete, with a fine record. He is left-handed, which gives him a tremendous advantage over other fellows."

"Bahaw! Tell that to the marines! An able-bodied man don't count that much!"

"I have seen his strength proved. It is extraordinary. He recently broke the

back of a constrictor snake and smashed the jaw of a grizzly bear."

"Oh, did he? Well, I'll match my fore-top hand, Borsen, against your left-handed athlete, as you call him. He hails from Norway, and knows his business, or I'm a lubber! He's always in for fun and never runs—not he!"

Panton rubbed his hands with glee.

"You have struck the keynote! Oh, if we can only make things work there is a big thing in store for us!"

"Ahoy, there! What is in the wind?" demanded the skipper, now keenly interested.

"Why, this is in the wind. A rich reward shall be yours if you can make your Norwegian knock overboard Left-Handed Joe, as he is called."

"Ho, ho! That's the way the tide runs, eh?" and the captain looked serious.

"How much is in it for me?" he asked.

"Any sum you like to mention in reason, if the job is well done, so that no questions can be asked."

"Say, a thousand dollars and consider the thing done," proposed the captain, after a moment's thought.

Captain Brooks received an assurance that he should have that amount, and thus Joe Manley was in for another attempt to put him out of the way.

In the morning after breakfast Joe and Fred took leave of Mr. Panton and accompanied Captain Brooks to the Fly By Night, which was lying in the Sound close to the town. They went on board in a small boat in waiting for the captain, and were invited into the cabin to have an early lunch. While this was going on sail was set and the vessel made her way through East River and New York Bay into the Atlantic.

In the afternoon the wind fell and the Fly By Night was totally becalmed off a sandy low lying shore.

The boys had plenty of time to make the acquaintance of the crew—a half a dozen in number, and prominent among them being the young Norwegian, Borsen.

This man was not friendly from the start, and regarded the other with hostile looks.

Borsen really had been spoken to by Captain Brooks and had been told not to put up with any nonsense from Left-Handed Joe, and also intimated that if he threw the young collegian overboard in the dark no notice would be taken of it.

They were put in the same watch, which began at midnight. When this was announced, the boys "turned in" for sleep until it was Joe's "trick" on deck.

"I say, Joe, all now seems clear sailing, but I've got something to say," remarked Fred, "and that is—beware of the Norwegian!"

"I don't see what I have to fear from him."

"He eyes you strangely, that I plainly see. Keep on your guard."

"Thank you for the hint. I will not fail to do so."

As the wind had now freshened and the vessel went bounding on her way down coast the sailor amateurs dropped off into sleep.

CHAPTER XIV.

THROWN OVERBOARD.

Left-Handed Joe was roused from his slumber by the shrill pipe of the boat-swain.

He tumbled out of his bunk, put on his clothes, and scrambled on deck.

There was no moon, but the stars were shining brightly. The air was frosty, striking a chill to Joe's bones. He felt that a brisk walk up and down the deck would do him good.

The Norwegian had turned out before him.

"What cheer, my hearty?" said Borsen. "Have you found your sea legs yet?" he asked.

"I was a bit rocky at first, but that has passed off," answered Joe, and I am in good trim for fun or duty.

"They tell me you are an athlete—a college champion. What can you do?"

"Whoever told you so must have made a mistake," retorted Joe, smiling. "Why I might run at the sight of a mouse."

"Is that so?" and the Norwegian showed that he was nettled. "Then consider me a mouse; let me see you run."

The Norwegian, too thick-headed to understand a joke, resented Joe's banter, and was in fighting mood on the moment, as Joe of course observed, whereupon he quietly remarked:

"My dear fellow, we do not like one another, but unfortunately we have to walk this deck in company."

"It is part of our duty," replied Borsen.

"Is there any reason why we should fight over it?"

"Not that I can see if you hold your American tongue; I want no Yankee slack."

"Oh, indeed? Well, my tongue is for use, and if my remarks do not please you, walk right away, my hearty!" and Joe's demeanor was not conciliatory.

The Norwegian treated this as a challenge, and at once took the initiative by jogging Joe rudely with his elbow, shoving him up against the mainmast.

Joe colored up to the eyes and ears with rage.

"See," he cried. "Do you know who you are playing with?"

"A mouse, you called yourself," replied the Norwegian tauntingly, "but show me what you can do," and he "squared away" in full fighting attitude.

"Oh, if that is the exercise I'm your man!" and the collegian confronted the bully.

They lunged at one another, striking a few blows—each feeling the other's reach and strength.

The Norwegian endeavored to clinch, as he dreaded Joe's famous left arm, of which he had been fully informed by Captain Brooks.

Seeing his tactics Joe lightly sprang backward, then hit out with his left. The blow landed under the right ear, with stunning force.

Borsen, like a man who had been suddenly stricken with paralysis, dropped to the deck and with a low moan rolled to the scuppers, where he lay insensible and motionless.

Joe did not take any further notice of him, but walked up and down with a gleam of satisfaction in his eye.

It was fully half an hour before Borsen recovered his senses.

Joe then was leaning over the binnacle talking to the man at the wheel, who had neither seen nor heard what had occurred.

The Norwegian got up, rubbed his ear, shook himself, and muttering a true Northman's execration, he drew an ordinary sailor's case knife from his belt, opened it, and crouched behind Joe.

"Look out!" cried the steersman.

Joe turned quickly.

"This is the way I fight," cried Borsen, with the face of a maddened bear showing his teeth.

Joe instantly whipped out his revolver, but the other did not pause; he rushed forward to stab the American.

Then came the sharp crack of a pistol and a yell from Borsen's livid lips.

He had been hard hit in the right arm, which hung limp and powerless by his side.

His knife dropped from his palsied hand and rattled on the deck.

"Curse you!" snarled the Northman; "you've got the best of me!"

"As I will have every time you interfere with me," retorted Joe.

The steersman now asked Joe to take the wheel while he attended to his messmate.

Stripping up and cutting the shirt-arm he deftly bound up the hurt with some rags he had in a locker.

It did not take him long to go through this performance.

"Shall I help you below?" he asked.

"I guess so. I'm not much use here; but so help me! I will make this a sick shot for yon Yankee upstart!" he threatened.

"Mind I don't give it you in the neck next time," Joe warned.

The Norwegian was led away, uttering imprecations, not loud but deep, for it was certain it would be some time before the big bruiser would be able to leave his berth, and longer still before he could recover the use of his arm.

Presently Joe was relieved by the helmsman.

"I have made a report to the skipper," the man advised.

"What did he seem to think of it?"

"That no blame could attach to you. He will be on deck directly and you can talk to him yourself."

In a short time Captain Brooks made his appearance, and seemed to be much annoyed at Borsen's conduct, but really was considering how to carry out his scheme to earn Pantan's money by getting rid of the collegian.

"I am very sorry that fellow attacked you as he did," Captain Brooks remarked.

"It does not matter," assured Joe.

"The cuss is always seeking a muss with somebody, and I am glad you have taught him a lesson."

"I hate to draw my gun on any one, but in this instance I had to do so."

"Of course there was nothing else open to you," replied the captain. "Your escape was a lucky one, for he certainly would have knifed you."

The captain returned to the companionway, and to all appearances descended, but, in reality, he paused on the steps, as if to plan and be ready for further action, for that, he felt, was the time and opportunity to act.

Joe walked up and down the deck moodily. His watch extended from fore-castle to mainmast.

The wind was now whistling shrilly through the rigging, and the sea was alight, fore and aft, with a phosphorescent foam.

As this coruscated in the starlight it was indescribably beautiful, and Joe, going well forward, leaned over the rail in musing mood.

In the distance he discerned the headlight of a large steamer, heading north by northeast, up the coast.

The sight was so novel, the scene so entrancing that Joe did not behold the

man stealthily approaching from the aft, like a thief in the night.

It was Captain Brooks.

What was his purpose?

That was not long in doubt.

Keeping the mainmast between him and the meditating Joe, he stood by the mast a moment; then, stepping forward to the bulwark over which the young athlete was leaning he noiselessly and deftly seized the youth's legs, and, with a quick, powerful lift, sent the hapless victim overboard!

CHAPTER XV.

RESCUED FROM THE SEA.

Joe fell headlong into the seething sea, but being an expert swimmer, he quickly was on the surface, while the vessel ran on, leaving him to his fate.

The Jersey coast was several miles distant, so despair seized him, for he could not long keep afloat.

His only chance of rescue was to be picked up by a passing steamer or sail-coaster, of which there were always many in that offing.

But how was he to attract attention? The chances seemed hopeless.

Fortunately the sea was smooth, so the exertion to keep afloat was less difficult.

Soon he saw the big steamer, which he had noticed before, about a mile off. Her course was in his direction.

He swam toward the steamer, which came rapidly on in her run up the coast for New York Harbor.

Nearer, and nearer, until at length, he was nearly under her bows.

The dawn now had become well advanced, and he could see the look-out as well as an officer pacing the bridge.

Now was his time, so treading water and placing his fingers in his mouth, he blew a succession of whistles that sounded over the waters as far as a locomotive whistle could have been heard.

This startling signal was heard distinctly by the officer on the deck, and the look-out quickly discerned the man in the water.

"Ahoy! Ahoy!" from the look-out.

"Ahoy! Ahoy!" from the look-out. athlete, waving his arms above him.

That was enough. Instantly the engines were rung down, and men rushed to the life boats, ready for the rescue.

Joe was now alongside of her about twenty yards distant, and he heard the command:

"Lower away. Quick there!"

To his great delight the boat soon dropped into the sea, and was rowed towards him by eager life savers.

A few minutes more and he was grasped by strong hands, and lifted into the stern sheets.

Three cheers burst from the lips of the joyous sailors.

The sweetest music Joe had ever heard!

On board in a sling he was swung, too exhausted to speak.

Into the captain's room he was borne, and there stripped and wrapt in blankets and put to bed, while the steamer's surgeon soon had a hot toddy at his lips, which he eagerly swallowed, and, in a few moments, fell asleep—the sleep of exhaustion.

When he awoke he found a steward sitting by his bed. He informed the patient that he was then in New York, at the pier of the West India steamers.

Joe was well enough to dress and go ashore, which he did after thanking the officers of the ship for their kindness and humane services.

Joe let them believe that he had fallen overboard during his watch.

He knew well enough that he had been

foully attacked from behind and thrown overboard, but by whom he was at a loss to conjecture.

The Norwegian certainly was not the villain, as he was too severely injured to leave his berth.

His suspicions fell upon the Cuban, but dismissed him from his thoughts, and for the first time began to suspect Mr. Pantan. Was it not possible that Captain Brooks might be a tool of Pantan's?

Paul Pantan personally certainly had no motive for injuring the athlete; therefore, if he had a hand in the attempt on Joe's life, he must be an agent of Mr. Hardy.

Remembering that his father's will gave his guardians everything in the event of Joe's death, the young man was quick to see the motive behind all these attempts on his life.

As he thought it all over, he was convinced that it really was Pantan who had instigated the Cuban and others to do him harm.

"I will sift this to the bottom," said Joe, to himself, "and woe betide those who endeavored to injure me, for by heavens, I will expose and punish them!"

The more Joe pondered over all that had occurred the more impressed was he with the idea which possessed him of Hardy's direct complicity in every one of the moves thus far made in what the young man now clearly discerned were meant for his destruction.

His future, therefore, must be devoted to the detective work necessary to get the evidence essential to the conviction of the chief rascal and his tools in their nefarious conspiracy.

To this end he determined to proceed at once to Atlantic City, by railway, to be there when the Fly By Night should arrive.

CHAPTER XVI.

A FRIGHTENED CAPTAIN AND A SETTLEMENT.

To Atlantic City Left-Hand Joe proceeded, by train, and reached there in ample time, for when the Fly By Night came into her berth at the pier, the young man was ensconced behind boxes, from which to make his observations and decide on his course of action.

The gang plank was lowered, and Captain Brooks stepped out on the pier, accompanied by Fred Standish.

Fred evidently was oppressed by a great grief; for he felt the loss of his friend most acutely.

The crew had informed him that Joe Manley had fallen overboard, and he mourned him as one dead.

The young chum could not think of remaining on the vessel after that, so resolved to go back to the school, and for this purpose he borrowed from the captain the money necessary to return to Flushing.

Brooks was glad enough to lend it, for he wished to get rid of the "green hand."

As they advanced toward the pile of freight behind which Joe was concealed, he heard all that passed between them.

"I thank you for this money," Fred said, as Brooks handed him a ten-dollar bill.

"Oh, that is all right. I think it wise for you to return to the school. It is the best place for you."

"You are sure, sir, that Joe fell overboard?"

"Of course he did! How else could he have vanished so completely?"

"Might not some one have thrown him into the sea?"

"Who was likely to do a thing of that kind?"

"The Norwegian, for one. I hear they had a fight."

"No, no. I tell you he must have been blown overboard."

"But, there was no wind to speak of!" persisted Fred.

"You are mistaken about that. It was blowing very hard when you were in your berth. You can tell anyone who asks for Manley, that he was lost at sea. Good-bye. You had better hurry up and catch your train."

A tall form emerged from behind the boxes, and confronted them.

"You lie!" came in a strong sepulchral voice.

"Left-Handed Joe, by all that is holy!" cried Fred.

The captain reeled, and laid hold of the boxes, in mingled fear and amazement.

"Who did the deed?" demanded Joe, as he stood before the cowering sailor.

"God forgive me!" was all the guilt-stricken wretch could say.

That of course was confession, unconsciously uttered.

And so Joe construed it.

"Neither God or man can forgive such an act," he said, in solemn, impressive speech.

"Oh! spare me. Spare me!" pleaded the self-convicted criminal.

Joe looked sternly at the shivering scoundrel, a moment, as if debating what to do.

"Who instigated you to the murder?" he at length demanded.

"Panton. Paul Panton!" Brooks unhesitatingly answered.

"Duplicity — treachery — murder!" murmured Joe in low voice, but spoken with intense emphasis.

And he was silent, for a few moments, gazing intently at the captain, who still shivered in his uncontrollable apprehension and guilt—really a pitiful sight to see.

Then Joe seemed to have made up his mind what course to pursue further.

"Captain Brooks, wretch that you are, I shall spare you arrest now. I must strike the greater scoundrels behind you, and use you for their conviction. Will you co-operate with me in bringing them to justice if I promise not to reveal your attempt on my life?"

Brooks was silent.

"It is that or your immediate arrest for murder!"

"Well, Joe, I stand ready to do what I can to help you. I see how I have lent myself to the game of villains, who always have tempted me with big promises of gain. I am now very sick of the whole business, and swear to you I never more will serve them, in any way. I shall abandon this vessel right here, and never see old Hardy, the villain, again, nor any of his pals. But, how can I do this if I have to go into court to testify? Why, you see, Mr. Manley, that my own share in their conspiracy against you would make me a party to the crime, and I could not escape state prison. Can't you think of some way for me to serve you, yet not ask me to appear in court?"

Joe thought a while, and at last said:

"I think I can fix it. I will write out a statement which you will sign, under oath; then you may formally turn over the Fly-By-Night to my keeping, and I will place Fred, here, in charge, until I have a settlement with my rascally guardian, whom I now know is robbing me of my fortune. The statement signed you can go your way, and I shall never trouble you. What do you say?"

"I say it's fair and square, and I'll do it, right away," answered the skipper, as if glad enough at such a chance of escape, not only from the penalty for his crime against Joe, but to shake off the vile service of old Hardy.

"Then come right along to a lawyer's office, which I passed on my way here. There we can fix up everything in good legal shape; and I give you my word you shall be permitted to leave here a free man, to go where you wish."

"You're one of the whitest men I ever met, Mr. Manley, and I never shall forget your leniency," and the captain, hardy old salt that he was, really wept.

The three proceeded from the pier up into the town, and found the lawyer's office they sought.

Joe passed in and conversed some time with the lawyer, and the two prepared a statement which covered all the grounds of evidence required to convict Hardy and Panton of this conspiracy against the young athlete.

This done, Fred and Captain Brooks were called in. The document was read aloud, and Brooks signed it, as he had promised.

Then another document, transferring the Fly-By-Night to the attorney, to be held in trust by him pending proceedings against Hardy, was also signed by the captain, and he was permitted to depart—a sadder but a better man than when he entered Hardy's service.

CHAPTER XVII.

CONCLUSION.

Joe Manley did not tarry long in Atlantic City. Fred was placed in charge of the Fly-By-Night, and the vessel "tied up" pending proceedings.

Then the young athlete turned his face toward New York City, armed with all the evidence necessary to bring Hardy and his tools to judgment.

But, as we shall see, the Fates had entered in the case and hastened that judgment.

After the sailing of the Fly-By-Night, Panton proceeded at once to Hardy's office. As if aware of the danger of his whole late proceeding against Joe, the scoundrel had resolved to get such money as he could force from the merchant, and then disappear, to avoid any possible arrest or trouble.

A very stormy interview followed.

"I am tired of this kind of work," the tool said, "and propose to quit it."

"Oh, do you?" sneered the employer.

"It is rather late in the day to throw up a job which you know was of your own suggestion."

"All the same I do throw it up, and now demand pay for my services."

"Oh, indeed?" again with a sneer.

"And, pray, what do you value your said services at?"

"Five thousand dollars, not a dollar less. It is that or I expose your whole nefarious scheme to get rid of Joe Manley, that you might secure his fortune."

"That's the programme, is it? Blackmail! And you are fool enough to think I will tumble to your game, eh?" and the old sinner's face hardened with a fierce, almost tigerish, expression.

"No blackmail!" retorted Paul. "It is my proper pay for doing your dirty work; that is all," returned the ally, also in a fierce mood.

"You scoundrel!" ejaculated the merchant, as he sprang to his feet, and, grasping the poker from beside the coal grate, which heated the combined library and office, the now infuriated man struck the other a blow upon the head which brought him to the floor.

It was a passionate act, and an unlucky one, if the blow should prove fatal, and that brought the irate merchant to his senses.

Paul Panton was hard hit, that was evident, for he lay quite still, and Hardy was almost terror stricken. What should he do? What could he do, if Panton was killed by the stroke?

It was awful. He would surely be held for the murder.

It was then well on in the evening. All the servants had retired, so he was alone.

At last a thought came to him. He would carry the body out to the stoop area; place it in the area, and, when discovered in the morning, it would be evident that the wound on the head had been made by the man tumbling down on the stone steps, and that would relieve him of all suspicion.

So he waited—waited in deepest anxiety, until he could move without possible detection.

One o'clock struck, and then he passed softly down the basement stairs, to see if the way was wholly clear.

No sound. All was still in deep sleep, apparently; so, returning to the library, he picked up the limp body, and, inspired with supernatural strength, he bore it down the stairway, out into the area, and placed it there in such a position as would imply that the man had fallen head first on the stone flagging, and so had been killed.

That act, done without any one's observation, would surely relieve him of all responsibility or suspicion, so he went to bed, but not to sleep. The now aroused conscience would not permit that.

All the rest of the night he planned.

He had squandered much of the Manley estate, and was not in a position to meet any inquiry on the part of Joe or his attorney. What should he do? He must decide, that was evident, for Joe, if still living, would be sure to unearth the whole base scheme for his destruction. That fear added more terror to his thoughts, and when morning came he had decided upon flight—flight to Canada, with such money as he could lay hands on, and draw from bank, where Joe's money was on deposit.

Strangely enough, when daylight came the body of Panton had disappeared, for nothing had been said by the servants, and no officers of the law had called.

What did it mean? Had Panton come to and gone away? That was the only thing which could account for the mystery.

Then it was all the more important to act, for Panton alive, as well as Joe Manley, his arrest might follow at any moment.

He had arranged to act, as we have said—to draw all available money from bank and hasten to Canada, pending inquiry and such settlement as he could from these effect.

After a hasty breakfast he returned to his office and was there packing up his necessary papers when, without announcement or knock at the door, Joe Manley stepped into the room!

"Ah, you Joe?" he called out, with forced calmness. "Glad to see you back, after your last escapade. Hope you'll go back to school and settle down to study."

Joe studied the man for a moment, in amazement at his effrontery. Then he spoke:

"Mr. Hardy, dissemblance is useless. I now know you for the villain that you are, and I have returned from that sea trip, in which you planned to have me thrown overboard, to demand an ac-

counting of you, and to send you to state's prison—where you belong. I have all the evidence necessary. As preliminary to calling in an officer for your arrest, I wish to—"

The interview was strangely interrupted.

Standing on the threshold was Paul Panton, with his head bandaged, looking haggard and ghostly!

He had been found at daylight by an officer, lying in the basement, and had been conveyed to the nearest hospital.

Here his wound was dressed and pronounced not to be serious; it was supposed he had been sandbagged and pitched down into the area.

After a rest he was well enough to drive to Mr. Hardy's house, and there confront him.

"You?" gasped the merchant.

"Yes, I, thief and would-be murderer! I am here to stop you from committing further crimes, to avenge my wrongs, and to save Joe Manley from your clutches!"

Behind him stood three policemen!

Escape was impossible.

Mr. Hardy looked from one to the other in despair, and yet, in sudden terrible determination.

His career was closed.

Retreating to the rear window, he suddenly drew a pistol and before any one there could interfere he had shot himself through the head!

Death was instantaneous.

There is little more to be said. After all Left-Hand Joe found himself well off, and with unbounded forgiveness in his soul, he forgave the penitent Paul Panton, and let him go without arrest or punishment.

As for the wily and treacherous Cuban, he disappeared as if the world had swallowed him up, and though Joe sought to ascertain his whereabouts, he never could learn of him.

The Left-Hand Athlete just longed to get his hands on the detestable conspirator and heartless villain.

The settlement of Hardy's estate gave the Fly-By-Night to Joe, and that noble fellow presented the nice craft to his good friend and chum, Fred, who, with a crew of fine fellows of his own choosing, and with Joe's advice, went into the West India trade and became a prosperous merchant.

So, all's well that ends well.

THE END.

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